

**THE POCAHONTAS TIMES**

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CALVIN W. PRICE, Editor.

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Le roi est mort; vivi roi! The king is dead; long live the king! This is in connection with the fishes of Greenbrier River. The king of the waters is no longer the bass but the pike. Every year the bass pushes his frontier farther north. In Summers and Greenbrier counties already the fishermen are testing their lines for pike, and unless they have a line that will lift a dead weight of some twenty pounds from the floor they go not forth.

Locomotive Engineer Meadows running out of Hinton went up to his summer home near Pence Springs to take his pleasure in fishing. He tested his lines in the shops to nineteen pounds. In the Greenbrier River at or near Pence Springs he cast a mighty dowajack patent bait. This is a strange lure that greatly resembles in size and suppleness a jumping-jack. At least it is jointed and made to jump and dance at the end of a string. I never could endure them. In fishing it was too much like throwing a stick at a cow.

Meadows caught or coupled up with a fish as long as a broom. It was a wall-eyed pike. No one thinks quicker than an engine driver. Especially one who takes heavy trains over the crest of the Alleghenies every day. It occurred to him that his couplings would break and he decided to let the pike have a lot of line so that the weight of the wet line in the water with the spring of the pole would overcome the resistance of a great fish fighting for life. So he let a lot of line run out but the fish never hesitated. It could not be turned and the line parted and line, bait and fish were lost.

The farthest north that the pike has been reported is Seebert, ten miles below Marlinton. I have never seen the fish. I am looking forward to having it out with one of them, for all my life I have wanted to catch a really big fish. I have had bass break my lines but it was because I had not prepared for them. In fact I had the experience of having the same bass break lines on two separate occasions. O the dreary, dreary moorland, O the barren, barren shore.

A few days ago a train was held up by orders at the mouth of Wolf Creek on the Greenbrier River below Alderson. The engineer while waiting observed in the clear waters of the Greenbrier a pike approximately three feet long chasing a bass approximately two and there was no commotion in the water. So far as he could tell the bass was not overtaken by its enemy.

The very large bass are mother bass, and as they watch their nests in the spring in the deep water by the banks, they fall one by one to the more powerful fish that has come into this river seeking what he may devour.

The pike ranks with the shark as the most voracious fish in the world. What the shark is to the salt water pike is to fresh water.

The pike (called salmon) is a well known West Virginia fish and it sometimes reaches the weight of thirty pounds. It is good to eat. Take out the hottest month of August and the coldest months of December and January. It can be taken nine months in the year. It is considered a desirable fish and it is protected by game and fish laws.

I have never seen this fish either in the water or out of it, and I am looking forward to its appearance in the pools that I have fished with somewhat the same curiosity that I looked forward to seeing a bass.

Up to the time I was fourteen years old, we lived on Muddy Creek, just below the mouth of Silver Creek, in Rockingham County, Virginia. My father was a minister. The creeks were good for eels, suckers, and sun perch. I commenced fishing in a diligent fashion at five years and by the time I was ten I was as good a fisher as any boy on those waters. I know that because I could keep the table supplied with fish in season. When I was eight years old, I caught a large eel and skinned it and cleaned it and coiled it in a crock and salted it and placed a pie pan on top of the crock, and set it on a shelf. This meant that I had got up at break of day and taken the eel off of a night and fixed it up in a business like fashion. I fix the age by the age and size of a younger brother who is now Dr. N. R. Price. By the time breakfast was ready the child came into the kitchen and wanting to see the eel, he climbed on a chair and lifted the lid of the crock, and the eel jumped out into his face and he fell off the chair and was most horribly shocked. The salt had caused the monster to uncoil like a spring. I was somehow blamed with the terrible scare the child had gotten, and the whole affair added to the complexities of life.

In the early eighties, my uncle, J. C. Price, of Pocahontas county, came drifting by with a great drove of cattle. Cattle from these mountains were driven north in those days. The Valley pike ran north and south through the Valley of Virginia but the great drives did not follow this hard surfaced road. They went by a dirt road which paralleled it and which lay nearer the foot of North Mountain. These drives were sold in Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, and paid for in currency, which was carried back by the cattlemen to the mountains and was distributed. We lived between the two roads, and this uncle rode in to spend the night.

Owing to the uncertain tenure of office that a minister must know, or for some other reason, or for some other reason, all of us children were raised in the information and belief that sometimes or other we would go to a promised land called Pocahontas, where my father had some land. Over there in the valley where there were many cultivated farms of small acreage, the five hun-

dred acres that my father owned in Pocahontas county sounded wonderfully important.

On the occasion of my uncle's visit, he told my father about a new fish that had appeared in the Greenbrier River, called the bass and which was here in great numbers. That made a deep impression on me. At that time fishing was the greatest joy of my life and living in the belief that I was but a stranger in the Valley, that Pocahontas was my home, I was most vitally interested in the fish life of the Greenbrier River.

Up to the time that the bass had come here, the river had nothing but bottom feeding fish, and only two that were of any value, the catfish and the sucker. The cat fish was taken when the water was muddy and by a dead bait on the bottom. I can well see that with a bass that could only be taken when the water was clear and then only with live bait, was such a reversal of form, that it is not to be wondered at that my uncle brought the news that the fish were here but that no satisfactory way had been found to catch them. The grown ups were discussing the way to get at them, and it was suggested that maybe by using the riding horses that the bass in the pools might be approached close enough to be fished for. It had not occurred to the community then that the day would come when men would stand in the water up to their knees for hours at a time until their toenails fell off, casting for bass.

And this fishing from horse back was not so visionary after all, for the late Col. Tom Callison, a rich farmer of the Levels district, pursued the numbers for years and caught untold numbers from the river down towards Droop Mountain. He got hold of a five pounder one day that was too great to be lifted to the level of the saddle and the fish wound the line around the legs of the trusty old mare, and man, horse, bass and all came out on the bank together. This was that good water just below Break neck. The first time I went there, I caught twenty-five weighing from one to two pounds each, one of the greatest catches I ever made, size considered.

That conversation which was had some forty odd years ago was not one that I had any part in other than that of a listening child, but it was of vital interest to me and I know that I commenced to plan to take bass from that time and strange to say I got the rudiments of a sound plan before I ever had a chance to wet a line in the river and before I ever saw a bass. I had never seen a modern rod and reel but when a few years afterwards we all moved to Pocahontas county in covered wagons I brought with me a line a hundred feet long, working on the theory that the way to catch bass was to cast a long line, and that is the one thing that is essential in the sport.

We arrived here September 10th, 1885. The season was well advanced but the water was extremely low and the bass were in sight. In the meantime, Lawyer W. L. Kee, of Randolph county, who was born here, had come back on a visit and knowing something of bass fishing had got the local rodmen started at the business, or at least they were discussing the great catches that he had made. Also some Englishmen had come here with fly rods and had caught great numbers of bass. One of them left a two handed sixteen-foot rod here that I afterwards used myself. Fly fishing was out of the question for it never occurred to us, the native born, that any of us would ever pay out money for a fishing pole, when the woods were full of them.

That first fall, I never got a bass. The long line was a strong soft cotton line and it was awkward to throw and I saw no way to use a pole with it. I tried it as a hand line. The next spring, I got the hang of the thing, by means of a springing pole and line and the knowledge that a half grown craw-fish was good bait. The great discovery however was that the bait should not touch the bottom, and that bass conversely to the sucker, took the bait moving, half way between the bottom and the top of the water. And pretty soon I had the family so thoroughly fed up on bass, that the food began to pall on the palate.

It took many days for me to take my first bass, but after that it was easy. Then as now, the water had to be low and clear, though I have known fishermen who could fish better in the first muddy rise in the river after a drought.

It was just in this way that I looked forward to seeing and taking my first bass, and now after all these years of vanity and vexation of spirit I look forward to the coming and the taking of the pike, and if I can believe all that I hear, then the taking of a big pike is as far ahead of fighting bass as the bass is of a sucker.

And as it was in the beginning so it is now that I am full of information and theories as to the way of taking a pike, that will probably not be reduced to active practise before my strong arm fails and my strength is spent.

The plan that appeals to me is from Bailey's Angler's Instructor

which lays down the following rule: "Having cast your bait as far as possible, allow it, if you are fishing in a pond, or lake, or deep water, to sink a little say two feet, then wind away at a brisk rate, holding your rod on one side, rather low; if no run, wind out and throw again, but this time, wind brisk four or five yards, then all of a sudden, stop a moment, then off again, doing so three or four times at one cast. I have often found this a good plan. If you still have no run try another throw and wind brisk as before, but occasionally giving your rod a sharp but short twitch."

This is a good deal like describing the way to lasso a wild steer. Take a lasso and throw it around the horns or feet of a wild steer and wind in. Or if that fails put a little salt on his tail.

No man by taking thought can add a cubit to his cast. It is a question of constant and actual practise. I once had to clear practically an island by cutting willows with my pocket knife to get room for a back cast to take a trout that I coveted.

Pike eat anything that moves. They have been known to drag down and devour dogs swimming in the water. They are destructive to water fowl and musk-rats are speedily exterminated by them.

Ten years or so ago, a fisherman told me that they had entered the Greenbrier River at its mouth and that in a short time they would have driven the bass out of the stream.

As a matter of fact, if it were not for one thing, all other fish life in a stream would be exterminated, and that is because, the pike is a cannibal. It devours its own kind. All the side streams of any size have bass in them, and it is not likely that the bass will be exterminated wholly either in the river or the creeks, but the day of the sure catch in bass fishing has come by.

The automobile has multiplied the fisherman by untold thousands, but the old rule applies, and that is that most men are harmless so far as fishing is concerned. In the days when the men who knew how could fill a basket with bass in an hour or so, there were untold numbers of fishermen who could not take any. This was just as true in the nineties, when bass fishing was at its height in the Greenbrier as it is now.

Men like Col. O. H. Kee can go out with a fly and bring in a lot of bass yet, but the common run of fisherman can only count on the average luck of men and an appetite. I have seen the fish life change in the Greenbrier from time to time in my brief existence. In the eighties a strange disease attacked the suckers and they died like flies. We children thought it was ruination. They were not wholly exterminated. Then the bass suffered from a parasite that rendered many of them unfit for food. The catfish that had swarmed the river practically disappeared, happily to come back to some degree afterwards.

In the past few years catfish have been taken in great quantities from the Greenbrier in Pocahontas county, but it is probably an exodus of the catfish fleeing before the pike of the lower pools.

Then a fish has appeared here by the untold thousands called the yoggle-eye. It is the rock bass and it is supposed to be an enemy of fish life as it is predatory in its nature. It is a very good pan fish and its only objection is that it is so small. It is an oval shaped fish nearly as broad as it is long. It has a powerful fin surface and takes the fly. The first report of this fish that I can find is a government publication noting the taking of one near the mouth of the river. The date of the publication is 1908.

I seem to have lost my lust for slaughter, but the stories about the big pike, must have found a crumb of the savage in my blood, for I am planning to get some time off and go to the big pools down near New River and see if there is a cannibal wall-eye waiting for me. Far away in the silent reaches, in a deep blue

pool by a sycamore tree, where the cannibal pike or the black bass breathes, a wall-eyed beauty is waiting for me.

But there is more pleasure in pursuit than in capture, and surer by weakness wiser men become, as they draw near to their eternal home. I was travelling with Hon. E. D. Talbott, of Elkins the other day, and he has a fish story about taking a big fish that was too big. He was wintering on an island in the Gulf of Mexico, at a hotel on the edge of the sea. He got bored one afternoon and some boys came to his relief and outfitted him for shark fishing. They took a hook made by the blacksmith and a rope. A sheep's-head was used for bait. The cast was made and the line led to the pier. Presently word was passed to the mountain fisherman that he would better come and take care of his prey before it destroyed the pier which seemed about to be pulled down. With the help of the community in which the catch was made, a thousand pound shark was landed, and it was promptly killed. After a time, the landlord came to where the fish was laying in front of the hotel and demanded that it be removed. For two dollars a local teamster brought his mules and the fish was snaked away for a distance to a high bank above the ocean, and committed to the deep. The next morning the landlord came again and demanded that the fish be removed. During the night it had floated back and was at the same place. And it took another two dollars to haul it away so far it could not come back.

This shark was so large that the mules could haul it by the hardest and by frequent rests.

Mr. Campbell, the high-rod of Lewisburg, has a camp on the Greenbrier and we hear of some big pike that he takes at this point, some miles above Caldwell. And large catches of pike have been reported from the deep pools near the mouth of Anthony Creek forty-five miles below Marlinton. My guess is that this fall they will be in our midst, and almost any day, some fisherman may come down Main Street with one of the strangers hung on a handspike on his way to a grocery store to be weighed on the scales.

Then it behooves every little girl to watch that beloved kitten for some enterprising pike fisherman will be looking for that kind of bait for the new sport about to be inaugurated in these waters.

The king is dead; long live the king!

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- 1 man's saddle, 2 side saddles,
- 1 lot of chairs, 1 large side board,
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- 1 kitchen cabinet, 1 dining table,
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